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CHAPTER 8

Leading Professional Learning Communities

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This chapter examines professional learning communities – what they are, what needs to be considered in thinking about their impact and what is involved in leading their development.

Educational leadership's moral purpose should be to enhance every child's and young person's learning in the broadest sense. In a fast-changing world, ensuring that all children's and young people's learning experiences and outcomes are of high quality – 'raising the bar and closing the gap' as it is expressed in several countries – is a major challenge for leaders, teachers and others supporting students' learning. These adults need the capacity to take charge of change and learn continuously themselves. Capacity, itself, is not a straightforward concept. It is a complex blend of motivation, skill, positive learning orientation, organizational conditions and culture, and an infrastructure of support that is not easy to come by. But, in coalescing, it gives individuals, groups and, ultimately whole-school communities and systems the power to get involved in and sustain learning. Creating and developing capacity is therefore an imperative for anyone passionate about improvement and transforming learning.

What has this got to do with professional learning communities? Research suggests that such communities may hold a critical key to capacity building. Rather than focusing on superficial quick fixes of change, professional learning communities appear to generate and support sustainable improvements because they build the capacity that helps keep schools progressing.

In this chapter I explore the following questions:

- What are professional learning communities?
- What difference do they make?
- How do you lead their development?

What are professional learning communities?

Despite nuances of interpretation, there is increasing international consensus that the term 'professional learning community' refers to an inclusive and mutually supportive group of people with a collaborative, reflective and growth-oriented approach towards investigating and learning more about their practice in order to improve pupils' learning.

What's in a word?

As language is important in conveying meaning, it may be helpful to think about the three words making up this expression. It is not chance that they have been used in association.

Community – the idea of community suggests that the focus is not on individual teachers learning but on learning within a collaborative community context – collective learning in a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Features of communities – shared beliefs and understandings, interaction and participation, interdependence, concern for individual and minority views, and meaningful relationships through personal connections – are important to a professional learning community. Chris Watkins (2005) uses the letters ABCD to describe how members of communities are Active participants, in a community where Belonging has developed, Collaboration is frequent and Diversity is embraced.

Learning – the focus was originally on what has become known as professional community, emphasizing the context and nature of work relations between teachers. Inserting the word 'learning' coincided with greater emphasis on the objective of improvement: a learning community with a collective purpose of enhancing student learning. Learning refers both to collaborative learning and collective learning. Traditional forms of professional development generally focus on opportunities for individuals to hone their knowledge and skills. But collaborative learning in and beyond the workplace – including peer observation, coaching, collaborative forms of research and enquiry and learning conversations – reinforces how learning within professional learning communities is not a solitary experience. Collective learning is different. It involves working together to develop shared meaning of concepts and practices. It is not just learning together; it is a joint process of generating new and common understandings and creating knowledge of value and use to all involved. In addition, it is a community that is collectively learning about its processes of learning.

Professional – the word 'professional' highlights that the community's work is underpinned by a specialized knowledge base, an ethic of service orienting members towards client needs, strong collective identity through professional commitment, and professional autonomy through collegial control over practice and professional standards. Professionalism is more closely linked now with school development in other words, to be a professional is to see your part in the whole picture and to play a role beyond your own immediate sphere of influence. The word professional also means that the emphasis is on developing adults as a learning community. This does not mean that students are unimportant, or that their learning is not the reason for having professional learning communities. Professional

learning communities are a means to an end: the ultimate aim is not to be a professional learning community. Collaborative work is the process, but the key purpose is to enhance teacher effectiveness as professionals, in order to improve students' learning, progress and achievement.

Think about creating capacity among adults that will make a difference for students:

By using the term *professional learning community* we signify our interest not only in discrete acts of teacher sharing, but in the establishment of a school-wide culture that makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, ongoing, and focused on critically examining practice to improve student outcomes ... The hypothesis is that what teachers do together outside of the classroom can be as important as what they do inside in affecting school restructuring, teachers' professional development, and student learning. (Louis et al., 2003: 3)

Who's in the community?

Traditionally, such communities were thought of as being the province of leaders and teachers within a particular school. Such a view, however, is potentially limiting of professional learning opportunities. Diversity of views and learning opportunities may be increased through including other members of the school community such as support staff or governor school council members. The main idea is that the entire school's culture is one oriented to developing a professional learning community but within this larger community there may be smaller communities: for example, groups of teachers who scrutinize their practice related to particular topics, sometimes described as teacher learning communities (William, 2007).

Similarly, extending the community to include members beyond the school or even internationally may bring to bear new knowledge. In an increasing networked society, many schools participate in a wider professional learning community, cluster or network. Some professional learning communities also involve people in other community agencies. These can be seen as professional learning communities when there is an unrelenting focus on students' learning and when headteachers (principals), teachers and other staff are networked in purposeful ways (Katz et al., 2009) such that their joint activity challenges members to break down boundaries in their own thinking and supports professional learning community activity within their individual schools. Whatever the composition, what is important is that the community is focused on learning in ways elaborated below.

How do you recognize a professional learning community?

Professional learning communities appear to share six intertwined characteristics or features that operate together. These are:

- 1 *Shared values and vision.* Having a shared vision and sense of purpose means there is 'an undeviating focus' on all students' learning because individual autonomy potentially reduces teacher efficacy when teachers cannot count on colleagues to reinforce objectives. In some professional

learning communities, the focus is more general – with professional learning community (PLC) as 'a way of being'. Elsewhere, specific areas of focus are selected over time by the PLC.

2 *Collective responsibility.* Members of a professional learning community consistently take collective responsibility for students' learning and for each other's learning. Such collective responsibility seems to help sustain commitment, puts peer pressure and accountability on those who do not do their fair share, and eases isolation.

3 *Reflective professional enquiry.* This includes 'reflective dialogue', conversations about serious educational issues or problems involving applying new knowledge in a sustained manner and 'deprivatization of practice' (Louis, Kruse and Associates, 1995), frequently examining teachers' practice through mutual observation and analysis, joint planning and development; seeking new knowledge; constantly converting tacit knowledge into shared public knowledge through interaction; and applying new ideas and information to problem-solving and solutions addressing students' needs (Hord, 1997).

4 *Collaboration.* Staff are involved in developmental activities with consequences for several people that go beyond superficial exchanges of help, support or assistance. Feelings of interdependence are central to such collaboration: a goal of better teaching practices would be considered unachievable without collaboration that links collaborative activity with achievement of shared purpose. Micropolitics may exist, but conflicts are managed more effectively; difference, debate and disagreement are considered essential. Diversity brings a richer perspective to collaborative challenges, 'stretching the professional repertoire beyond usual, habitual, or comfortable practice' (Mitchell and Sackney, 2007: 33).

5 *Group, as well as individual, learning is promoted.* All teachers are learners with their colleagues. In 'learning enriched schools' (Rosenholtz, 1989), teachers' professional self renewal is communal rather than solitary. Collective learning is also evident, as the school learning community interacts, engages in serious dialogue, deliberating about information and data, interpreting it communally and sharing it.

6 *Trusting relationships.* Effective professional learning communities are characterized by what Bryk and Schneider (2002) describe as 'relational trust'. This includes respect, belief in colleagues' competence, personal regard for others – caring about each other – and knowing that people will do what they say; integrity. Trust is sometimes also seen as a precondition for developing professional learning communities.

What difference do professional learning communities make?

Changing what goes on in schools and classrooms is demanding and time-consuming, so there is little point in doing something that does not make a difference. The impact of professional learning communities can be seen at several

levels. Historically, the main focus was on improving teachers' practice and morale, and interest in the difference professional learning community might make for the whole organization. That is not where I start.

A difference for students

The ultimate impact has to be the difference that professional learning communities make for children and young people.

The evidence of links between professional learning community and student learning outcomes is still relatively modest. A review of PLCs' impact on teaching practice and student learning found eight robust research studies that explored the connection between PLCs and student outcomes. In all cases, student learning improved. The key to increased achievement was a 'persistent focus on student learning and achievement by the teachers in the learning communities' (Vescio et al., 2008: 87). An international review by Helen Timperley and colleagues in New Zealand (2008) of teacher professional learning and development that makes a difference to student outcomes concludes that in professional learning communities that promote student learning, teachers focus on analysing the impact of their teaching on student learning and are supported to process new understandings and their implications for teaching. The evaluation of Networked Learning Communities, a major programme in England, also found a link between improvements in students' academic results and the number of people in a school actively participating in a network that appeared to be related to the network's influence on teachers' thinking and changing their practice (Earl and Katz, 2006).

Would broader measures of student engagement with the school as a learning community be more appropriate indicators of impact? This issue is little explored. Whatever measures are chosen, the point is that while teacher learning is extremely important, the purpose of promoting staff learning must always be to maximize the learning of students.

Enhancing teacher morale, learning and practice

Enhancing morale and job satisfaction is clearly important. Professional learning community can act as a buffer against the kind of issues causing teachers to leave the profession. Being able to feel part of a school-wide community may be particularly significant in today's world characterized by greater change and uncertainty about meaning and values.

Improving teachers' practice is a major goal of professional learning communities. Teachers' knowledge base can be enhanced and there is an impact more generally on teachers' classroom work, although it's more difficult to find specific changes to teaching practice as a result of participation in a professional learning community. So, in schools with a genuine sense of community, an increased sense of work efficacy leads to increased classroom motivation and work satisfaction, with subsequent increases in collective responsibility for student learning. Where professional learning community is stronger, the influence of professional development programmes on teachers' knowledge and practice is also greater (Ingrason et al., 2005). The path between professional learning community and improvement

in practice is not necessarily direct. Instead, it appears to foster change in practice by creating an environment that supports innovation and experimentation, and this is what promotes teacher learning.

Organizational capacity building and improvement

Improvements in individual teachers' practice does not change practice in whole schools. Professional learning communities may provide some answers to the question of how learning and development is dispersed throughout schools, because, where they are functioning at a high level, they appear to have the capacity for learning, enquiry, change and innovation. It is generally thought that this is because they are a means to achieving long-term cultural change in an organization. Establishing lasting collaborative cultures that constantly focus on building the capacity for continuous learning and improvement are critical in a complex and fast-changing world. They are also particularly important in helping spread and sustain improvements in individual teachers' practice and morale.

An emerging aspect of organizational capacity is the ability to engage more effectively with the outside world. Members of more effective professional learning communities are more outward looking and better able to connect productively with outside partners and bring the knowledge from these partnerships back to their community.

In summary, the closer the professional learning community gets to affecting and enhancing teachers' practice, the more likely it is that student outcomes will be influenced. Broader benefits of PLCs are important, however, in developing the culture of learning and enquiry throughout the community that acts as a supporting and energizing condition and stimulus for the focused and deeper work of community members.

How do leaders develop learning communities?

Developing professional learning communities depends on working on a number of processes. These depend on leadership. The idea of professional learning communities should be appealing to principals and headteachers because we know that these leaders have a largely indirect impact on students' progress (Leithwood et al., 2008) and that their greatest power on enhancing student learning can be found in their involvement in and commitment to the learning of teachers (Robinson et al., 2009). Developing professional learning communities creates the culture within which powerful teacher professional learning can take place.

Figure 8.1 shows the development processes that are all connected, as highlighted by the broken lines; they are not mutually exclusive.

Sharing a student learning focus

Collectively clarifying the community's purpose, and then sharpening this to focus on improving or transforming mutually agreed-on areas of student learning gives a PLC its *raison d'être*. Professional learning communities are concerned with

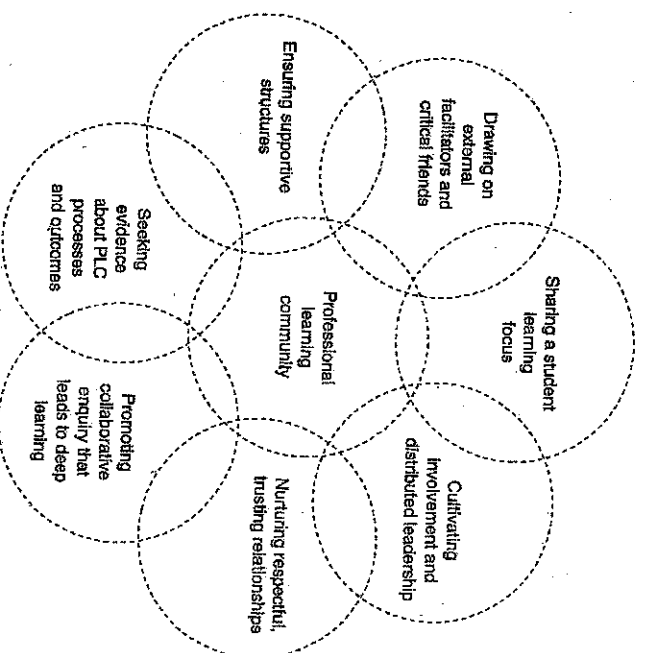


Figure 8.1 Processes involved in leading professional learning communities

improving student learning and practice in the here and now and also preparing students and themselves for a rapidly changing world. This can present a balancing act for leaders: both gathering and paying attention to evidence about strong learning and teaching practice, and encouraging new approaches inspired by fast-emerging knowledge about twenty-first century learning, new understandings about intelligence and their implications for education (Stoll et al., 2010).

Cultivating involvement and distributed leadership

Wide involvement of community members in activities that make a difference to people's practice and student learning needs to be promoted. Commitment to distributed leadership ensures active engagement of colleagues at different levels in leadership practice. This is both leadership within and between school professional learning communities and networks. Headteachers have a major role to play here in distributing the leadership and ensuring engagement and involvement of colleagues (Harris and Jones, 2010). Distributed leadership fits well with the notion of collective responsibility. Interest is also increasingly focused on finding ways for support staff and governors/school council members to contribute actively and lead various activities.

Nurturing trust and collaboration

Developing professional learning community is a human and emotional enterprise with the associated complexity of bringing about change. Working together productively depends on positive relationships and collegiality, and interdependence between colleagues that allows serious challenge and adjustment of practice. Very often, trust-building starts with those in senior leadership positions inviting others to share in the leadership of the school, and engaging them in collective learning which is meaningful to them. This helps build trust with each other (Fleming and Thompson, 2004).

Promoting collaborative enquiry that leads to deep learning

For professional learning communities to be intellectually vigorous, members need a solid basis of expert knowledge and skills. Where should decisions come from about the focus for professional learning? Increasingly, it seems that key activities within PLCs are collaborative forms of enquiry where groups systematically and intentionally investigate and explore issues related to student learning with implications for their practice (see Kaser and Halbert, 2009 and McLaughlin and Mitra, 2003, for two examples). Collaborative enquiry can also identify areas of focus for professional learning. Based on their synthesis of research evidence on professional learning, Timperley and colleagues (2008) developed an enquiry cycle that starts by asking what educational outcomes are valued for students and how students are doing in relation to those outcomes. Other questions follow: What knowledge and skills do teachers need to support students in achieving these outcomes? How do leaders promote teacher learning related to these desired outcomes? Other deep learning opportunities can then be developed to help build the necessary knowledge and skills before asking the final questions: what changes are made for students and what is the impact?

Collaborative enquiry has particular potential to stimulate evidence-based learning conversations. This type of professional dialogue causes a learning community to reflect on and challenge their existing practice; to rethink what they know and do. Developing learning conversations isn't easy. As Lorna Earl and Helen Timperley (2008) explain, they involve negotiating the terrain of trusting relationships, honestly examining relevant evidence and using a set of powerful enquiries *all at the same time*, as well as an undeviating focus on student learning which is sometimes a challenge for teachers.

Seeking evidence about PLC processes and outcomes

Professional learning communities focus on results that are important. Tracking the benefits to see a positive difference in student learning may be methodologically challenging but it is essential. In addition to existing impact studies, members of PLCs themselves can identify indicators related to the ultimate outcomes they are seeking, as well as intermediate outcomes related to theories they have about how they expect their community's activities to make a difference. A broad perspective needs to be taken to examining outcomes in order to avoid

the narrowness and 'negative space' issues involved with using single test measures as indicators.

Ensuring supportive structures

Structures shape organizations' capacities to develop learning communities. At their best, structures enable better and deeper communication between members of learning communities. Coordination, communication mechanisms, interdependent roles, joint governance structures (in the case of more than one school) and collaborative plans are all important. Here I focus on two particular structures: time and space.

When you're thinking about stimulating meaningful learning, you have to consider *time* (Stoll et al., 2003). Talk, exchange about and joint reflection on professional issues are key elements of the collaborative activity necessary to develop and connect professional learning communities. These require time, which does not only mean being able to cover staff who engage in enquiry and development activities or attending meetings, but planning and organizing time such that learning with and from a small number of colleagues in one school or several schools can be fed back into the school's wider learning community and reconstructed to create new knowledge. Meeting agendas focused on learning and team teaching increase time for professional learning community development. The challenge is to find creative ways to deal with the perennial challenges of time, or else PLC activities just become an 'add on' to an already overloaded agenda.

Space can also be a facilitator, and one with interesting shifts in meaning. In schools, professional exchange is facilitated by physical proximity, for example teachers in a department in neighbouring classrooms and with interdependent teaching roles, such as team teaching and joint planning. In learning networks, ensuring equality and equal access between partners suggests that meetings and school and classroom visits need to be rotated around schools, whilst similar concerns in extended learning communities implies that meetings should either be rotated around the different community partner locations or held within neutral locations such as community centres or coffee shops. Eighteenth-century coffee houses were known as places for stimulating and sociable conversations, offering a combination of intimate and private spaces and ones that were public and open to speakers of all status, wealth or power. In the coffee house, everyone's contributions were treated as equal.

Community space now also includes the virtual space through which networks of internet users connect and communicate. In this world of mass collaboration, networks of individuals are sharing, adapting and updating knowledge. The Internet also provides a connecting communication mechanism when time to meet is hard to find.

Drawing on external facilitators and critical friends

While formal and informal leadership of professional learning communities can stimulate, oversee and coordinate many of the development processes, external facilitation can also play a significant role. In the same way that effective

professional learning can be enhanced by external input that challenges existing assumptions, an external perspective to a learning network may be necessary to challenge the natural group think that tends to develop amongst the network leaders (Hadfield and Chapman, 2009). A key activity for these facilitators is finding ways to help PLC members engage with external knowledge so that it stimulates dialogue that makes their presuppositions, ideas, beliefs and feelings explicit and available for exploration.

Does the development process change over time?

Bringing about change does not just require knowledge of processes and skills involved. Better understanding of how they blend together and change over time is also needed. Change in professional learning communities isn't linear, as a headteacher in the *Creating and Sustaining Effective Professional Learning Communities* project described it, it goes through 'ebbs and flows' (Stoll et al., 2006). The path is more fluid than fixed, as PLCs perennially evolve with accumulating collective experience. Nonetheless, it seems they go through broad phases of development, generally connected to stages of educational change and levels of use of innovations. People are beginning to map out how the characteristics and processes change over time as professional learning communities broadly move through the phases. Source materials based on the *Creating and Sustaining Effective Learning Communities* project outline four 'phases' of the journey:

- 1 *Starting out*: acquiring information and beginning to use ideas.
- 2 *Developing*: experimenting with strategies and building on initial commitment.
- 3 *Deepening*: well on the way, having achieved a degree of mastery and feeling the benefits.
- 4 *Sustaining*: introducing new developments, and re-evaluating quality – professional learning community as 'a way of life'.

Perhaps communities have to be at a certain stage of readiness before they can engage in the collective learning that characterizes professional learning community.

Two stories

Here are stories of two schools at different stages of their journeys as they were developing their professional learning communities. These stories come from the *Creating and Sustaining Effective Professional Learning Communities* project (Bolam et al., 2005; Stoll et al., 2006). At the start of the project, the headteacher of the first, Highdown, primary school viewed it as 'starting out'. The second story is quite different: it is about a secondary school that, in terms of the phases above, would be seen, at least, to be already 'deepening' when the project began.

Highdown Primary School – starting out and developing a PLC

Highdown was a maintained primary school for 300 boys and girls aged 3–11, 35 per cent of whom were entitled to free school meals, almost twice the national

average. Its spacious 1950s buildings were set in an outlying area of a large city on a council housing estate in an area of high unemployment.

The previous head had been in the school for over 25 years. Staff had supported each other through an external inspection that the school had failed. The new headteacher, in post for under two years, who had been deputy head in a multicultural, inner city school in the same local authority, saw the school as an 'early starter' PLC in transition.

I came into a school that is ripe. The staff are lovely, but there's no fire. There's massive potential.

At that time, she thought there was no overall community feeling, although some subgroups demonstrated mutual respect and trust.

I want all of us to be a learning community. I am head learner. I want teachers really engaging in professional learning and to be part of the network of support staff. I want to grow my own classroom assistants. I want my parents to be involved as part of the community ... Collective responsibility is not school wide ... They are getting the ethos right but not the learning ... There were great results for Key Stage 2 [ages 7–11] but they set low targets – they had low expectations ...

She saw herself as 'lighting fires with lots of initiatives and opportunities' but wanted more initiatives to come from staff. The senior management team (SMT) was 'taking some initiatives' and the staff did 'come on board but do not initiate things of their own'. A PLC was consciously promoted by, for example, the allocation of changed responsibilities to the new deputy head, an enhanced role for teaching assistants, improving the school environment, making strategic staff appointments, working with the governing body, coaching and mentoring of staff by the headteacher, performance management and student targets linked into the school improvement plan; and continuing professional development.

Some staff were critical of insufficient delegation; one teacher thought that the school seemed more of a PLC than some other local schools; staff in one key stage said they were all friends and that was one reason they worked together so well. Two years later the Key Stage 2 coordinator described staff in general as:

fantastic and as having the same philosophy about children. It made the meetings very easy. We're all singing from the same hymn sheet. The classroom assistants are as good as any teacher. They really do take on board all the ideas that have come along.

The school seemed to be moving well on its journey to develop a PLC.

Princeland High School – deepening and sustaining a PLC

Princeland was in a rural location 10 miles outside a large city. It had about 1,000 students, aged 13–18, 60 teaching and eight support staff. Student achievement

was above average. External inspectors noted that the headteacher and senior staff provided very good leadership and promoted an inclusive and engaging spirit, encouraging staff to believe they could affect the school's direction. Staff had been focusing on improving learning and teaching for several years. A deputy headteacher, with a brief for learning development, explained:

the school is developing emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills and strategies to raise achievement. We've been doing it for a long time and the last two and a half years we have been looking at learning. We've been looking at people skills for seven years ...

The headteacher described the school as a thriving community when he arrived four years earlier:

there was a lot going on. The previous head had done a fantastic job and had created a vision and direction for the school ... as an organization leading the community through regeneration ... very significant and very unusual ... We wanted to continue that work and embed it.

He was committed to promoting learning and to a distributed style of leadership:

there is a lot of delegated authority but not delegated responsibility ... I think it's a belief in outcomes rather than process, we know where we want to go and that's shared and accepted by everybody but how we get there is a decision that we take and that's really a decision that people will take in teams.

The senior leadership team were encouraging staff to take a whole-school view of learning. The deputy headteacher with curriculum responsibility said: 'virtually every policy that we write we put the emphasis on teaching and learning'. Three successful strategies were: the Learning Forum, a voluntary, half-termly, after-school meeting where learning and teaching were discussed and good practice shared; the Learning Leader initiative whereby teachers bid for internal resources to develop a learning project - within two years 10 projects were under way; and increasing classroom observation and feedback as a means of professional development and learning. Of this, a deputy headteacher said:

the big leap that's been able to help us in the last two or three years is people are no longer defensive about being observed or intermingling with each other - there's a whole new culture.

Day-to-day administration tasks were well handled, with sound administrative systems. Relationships between staff had been good for many years and staff felt it was a caring school. Systems for mentoring, coaching and facilitation for staff had also been introduced. Comments from several teachers indicated that they

felt professionally supported and encouraged to develop: 'You're encouraged to take risks and be a bit more creative and to work together and develop and share good practice'. Staff were increasingly using information and communication technology (ICT) which facilitated exchange of information and ideas within the school and beyond. The school was involved in several external partnerships and networks and was the lead school in a large networked learning community. It was also leading on initiatives with the local community, for example, a partnership had been developed to secure funding to build a state of the art football facility which could be jointly managed and used by the school and the community. Funding was being sought to set up a virtual college for vocational training which would serve five secondary schools in the area.

What about sustainability?

Sustainability is the elusive elixir of educational change and professional learning communities. Is Prinseland still as vibrant a professional learning community as it was a few years ago? The paucity of longitudinal research on professional learning communities means we still know relatively little about the potential for establishing enduringly effective ones and need to keep learning more. Tony Bryk and colleagues (1999) suggest that when internal socialization routines are working properly, they may provide a self-renewal mechanism for professional communities, but much evidence suggests that effective PLCs often subsequently decline. This is likely to be exacerbated in jurisdictions where becoming a professional learning community, originally voluntary and invitational, is now mandated. Paying regular and serious attention to the processes of development appears to be a good start.

Using the ideas

Several resources are now available to help people explore and develop their professional learning communities. A set of materials colleagues and I created (Stoll et al., 2006), arising out of the research project *Creating and Sustaining Effective Professional Learning Communities*, are designed to promote understanding of and engagement with the idea and practice of professional learning communities with particular reference to people's own contexts, and to stimulate professional learning communities by promoting self-evaluation, reflective enquiry, dialogue, collaborative learning and problem-solving. In other words, the intention is to provide practical support for those wishing to develop and sustain themselves as effective professional learning communities, using an enquiry-oriented approach, in line with definitions of a professional learning community.

Professional learning communities are places, sometimes even spaces, where dialogue and reflection is part of the everyday fabric of their existence. In the spirit of professional learning communities, I conclude with questions for you to consider together within and between your professional learning community contexts.

Reflective Questions

- 1 What is your story of professional learning community development? What have been your high points in developing your professional learning community? What about your challenges? How have you addressed these?
- 2 How should a professional learning community's effectiveness be evaluated? How do you know your professional learning community/communities is/are effective?
- 3 What strategies do you have to sustain your professional learning communities?
- 4 Is true collective responsibility for enhancing learning across all schools in a district or local region cluster possible?

Further Reading

Hipp, K.K. (ed.) (2006) *Leadership and student learning in professional learning communities*, *Journal of School Leadership*, special issue, 16(5).

The entire issue of this journal is devoted to a set of international articles that focus on setting the stage for promoting school development using PLCs, building leadership capacity to promote sustainable PLCs, engaging in large-scale sustainable change, and inclusive learning communities.

Stoll, L. and Louis, K.S. (eds) (2007) *Professional Learning Communities: Divergence, Depth and Dilemmas*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

This international collection explores three of the most challenging dilemmas facing professional learning communities. The authors provide pointers on why these challenges exist, offering rays of hope for ways forward. It is valuable reading for anyone interested in building capacity and harnessing their community as a resource for change.

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